MONOTYPES BY

Maurice Prendergast

Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris

Works in the Exhibition

Dimensions are in inches, height preceding width. Sight refers to measurements taken within the frame or mat opening. All works are oil monotypes by Maurice Prendergast (1859–1924) from the Daniel J. Terra Collection of the Terra Museum of American Art, Chicago.

Esplanade, c. 1891
6½ x 5¾ (sheet and image)

Children in Street, c. 1891–94
13⅛ x 9⅝ (sheet); 8⅝ x 5¾ (image)

Going to School, c. 1891–94
8⅝ x 5¾ (image)

Green Dress, c. 1891–94
11 x 8 7/16 (sight)

Lady with Handkerchief, c. 1891–94
9⅛ x 4 3/16 (sight)

Lady with Umbrella, c. 1891–94
9⅛ x 4 1/16 (sight)

Primrose Hill. c. 1891–94
7⅜ x 5 9/16 (image)

Primrose Hill No. 2. c. 1891–94
7⅜ x 5 9/16 (image)

Red Haired Lady with Hat, c. 1891–94
13¾ x 9¼ (sight)

Street Scene, c. 1891–94
8 9/16 x 12⅜ (image)

Early Evening, Paris, c. 1892
5¾ x 4¼ (image)

Jumping Rope, c. 1892–95
11¾ x 10¼ (sheet); 6 9/16 x 5 3/16 (image)

Skipping Rope, c. 1892–95
5 1/16 x 10⅛ (image)

At the Seashore, 1895
8 x 6¼ (sheet); 7⅝ x 5 15/16 (image)

Children in Red Capes, 1895
5 11/16 x 6 (image)

Circus Scene with Horse, 1895
4¾ x 6½ (image)

Figures Along the Shore, 1895
11¼ x 10 (sheet); 6⅞ x 4⅞ (image)

Spring in Franklin Park, 1895
10 x 7⅞ (image)

Bareback Rider, c. 1895
11¾ x 7½ (image)

Children at Play. c. 1895
15½ x 11 (sheet); 6 13/16 x 4 15/16 (image)

Dress Rehearsal, c. 1895
12¼ x 9 (image)

Nouveau Cirque (Paris), c. 1895
13⅞ x 13¾ (image)

Three Sketches: Springtime, Lady in Red, Little Girl in Red, c. 1895
13¼ x 10¼ (sight)

Crescent Beach, c. 1895–96
10 x 4⅜ (image)

Evening, South Boston Pier, c. 1895–96
14 7/16 x 8 15/16 (sheet); 10 x 5 (image)

The Breezy Common, c. 1895–97
10 15/16 x 8 (sheet); 8 5/16 x 6⅜ (image)

The Breezy Common, c. 1895–97
7 x 9 (sight)

The Breezy Common, c. 1895–97
7 x 8¾ (image)

Lady with Umbrella, c. 1895–97
9⅛ x 6⅛ (image)

Marine Park, c. 1895–97
7 7/16 x 10⅛ (sight)

Promenade, c. 1895–97
11 1/16 x 14½ (sheet); 7½ x 11⅝ (image)

The Race, c. 1895–97
9 x 9⅝ (sheet); 7⅞ x 9 (image)

Street Scene, c. 1895–97
6⅜ x 10 3/16 (sight)

Telegraph Hill, c. 1895–97
14 x 14⅜ (sheet)

Windy Day, c. 1895–97
6 1/16 x 9 1/16 (sheet and image)

The Opera Cloak, c. 1898
8 x 4 (image)

Bella Ragazza: Merceria. c. 1898–99
9 x 9⅞ (sheet); 6 x 7 1/16 (image)

Monte Pincio (The Pincian Hill), c. 1898–99
10 7/16 x 13½ (sheet); 7½ x 9¼ (image)

On the Corso, Rome, c. 1898–99
11 7/16 x 7⅛ (sight)

Venetian Court. c. 1898–99
11 x 10 (sheet); 7⅜ x 5⅞ (image)

Venetian Well, c. 1898–99
7⅜ x 5 11/16 (image)

Venice, c. 1898–99
10 x 7¾ (image)

Festa del Redentore, c. 1899
12¼ x 7⅜ (image)

Lady in Hat and Green Cape, c. 1898–1901
13¾ x 7⅜ (sheet); 9½ x 4⅜ (image)

Two Ladies, c. 1898–1901
8⅝ x 6⅝ (sheet); 5¾ x 3½ (image)

Woman in Blue Dress with White Boa and Large Red Hat, c. 1898–1901
14 7/16 x 10⅝ (sheet); 9⅞ x 5 (image)

Woman in White Muslin Dress, c. 1898–1901
9⅞ x 4 (plate)

Young Woman with Muff, c. 1898–1901
14 11/16 x 8 (sheet); 9 15/16 x 3 15/16 (image)

Lady with a Muff, 1900
15½ x 9⅝ (sheet); 10 x 4⅜ (image)

In the Park, c. 1900–02
9⅞ x 7 13/16 (image)

Reflection (Fishing Party), c. 1900–02
9⅞ x 7⅞ (image)

Watching the Races, c. 1900–02
11¾ x 10½ (sheet); 8 x 6 13/16 (image)

Summer Day, 1901
11½ x 14 (sight)

Lady in Pink, c. 1901
15½ x 9⅞ (sheet); 9⅞ x 4 (image)

Lighthouse, c. 1901
9¼ x 14 (image)

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from the Terra Museum of American Art

Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris

February 26–April 22, 1987

Red Haired Lady with Hat, c. 1891–94

In a period lasting little more than a decade, between 1891 and 1902, Maurice Prendergast created about two hundred monotype prints—one of the largest bodies of work ever produced in this medium. Of the 151 monotypes known today, more than one-third are in the collection of the Terra Museum of American Art.

In his prints as well as in his paintings, Prendergast portrays an idyllic world of holidays and festivals, of parks and beaches, populated by graceful women and charming children in fashionable attire. He is sometimes linked with the Ashcan School—those American realist painters famous for their views of urban life—because he participated in the historic 1908 exhibition of "The Eight" at the Macbeth Gallery in New York. But Prendergast was probably America's first Post-Impressionist painter; growing out of the traditions that fostered such disparate artists as Whistler, Puvis de Chavannes, Bonnard, Cézanne, and Matisse, he forged a style utterly his own.

Maurice Brazil Prendergast was born on October 10, 1859, in St. John's, Newfoundland. When he was two, his family moved to Boston, where he spent most of his life. It was not until 1891, at the age of thirty-one, that he began his career with a trip to Paris to study art. His response to Paris was instantaneous: he blossomed in this atmosphere and his unique style developed with dramatic celerity so that his early pictures are immediately recognizable as those of the mature artist we know. Prendergast's work of the 1890s displays strong affinities both with the French group known as the Nabis and with Japanese prints, which had become exceedingly popular in France. In *Lady with Umbrella, Green Dress*, and *Red Haired Lady with Hat*, the subjects are standing female figures, Oriental in their intricate silhouettes, in the mannered elegance of their postures, and in the simplification of the palette. Both *Promenade* and *The Breezy Common* are unmistakably Nabi-like in their compositions; objects are treated as flat patterns of shape and color, carefully deployed across a single plane.

Throughout this period, Prendergast exhibited his monotypes along with the watercolors, indicating that his interest in the medium was more than desultory. He considered these monotypes finished works of art in their own right, in no way subordinate to his watercolors. Of all the forms of printmaking, the monotype is, technically speaking, the least complicated one. The artist paints, usually with printer's ink or oils, upon a smooth, non-absorbent surface such as glass or metal; that surface is known as the plate. He then places a piece of paper upon the plate and transfers the painted image to it by applying pressure with a press, a roller, or an implement such as a spoon.

In order to prevent blurring of the image in transfer, the paint must be applied thinly. The pressure nonetheless causes the slightly diffused edge which is a distinguishing characteristic of the monotype. This transfer of the oil onto the paper in a very thin layer imparts two other traits to the monotype: flatness of surface and pervasive luminosity, the latter because the underlying paper remains visible, casting light through the pigment. Because of the rapidity with which paint dries, oil monotypes such as Prendergast's must be speedily executed; this speed tends to result in broadly painted, spontaneous statements. Because it involves a transfer process, and because the product of that process is a flat image, monotype is generally categorized as a print medium. It is, however, something of a hybrid, combining as it does elements of printmaking with those of painting.

Prendergast always seems to have worked his monotypes in oil paint. The support he customarily chose was Japanese tissue, a paper ideal for the purpose for several reasons: it is malleable, it is receptive, and its surface sheen imparts an attractive luminosity. In many of Prendergast's monotypes, no plate marks whatsoever are discernible on the paper: where plate marks are visible, they tend to be relatively faint ones, certainly not the sharp depressions a press would create. Consequently, it may be assumed that Prendergast used a spoon or like implement, rather than a press, in order to effect the transfer of image from plate to paper. A spoon offers a greater degree of control by permitting the application of different amounts of pressure to different areas of the paper.

Prendergast was conspicuously at ease with the monotype medium. After applying pigment to the plate, he refined the image by manipulating the pigment in any one of several ways. He might remove relatively broad areas of paint by wiping them away with a cloth or brush, as, for example, in *Children at Play*, where the white of the kites at the upper left is in fact the paper itself. He frequently created fine lines by removing paint with the end of the brush handle, as in *Spring in Franklin Park*, where the technique accents the foliage and delineates the figures.

After printing the monotype, Prendergast sometimes worked directly on the paper. His additions were usually made in pencil—in *Lady with Handkerchief* the woman's features, her veil, and the outline of her muff are all drawn in. On at least one occasion, Prendergast made the alterations in watercolor; in *Lighthouse*, very substantial areas have been worked in this medium, including most of the figure of the boy at the left. An inspired and memorable colorist, Prendergast frequently employed color with a remarkable economy in his monotypes. Indeed, the prints are often preconceived in terms of one dominant and unifying hue: *In the Park* and *Reflection (Fishing Party)* are both predominantly green, while in *Skipping Rope* and *Dress Rehearsal* the prevailing tone is rusty red.

Such use of color is only one of Prendergast's organizational tools. Another means he employs is the artfully planned distribution of shapes across the picture plane. Objects function on two levels: the literal and the abstract. A parasol is more than simply a parasol; it is also a circular form which plays a specific role in the compositional ordering of the picture. In *Promenade*, the rhythmic sequence of open umbrellas forces the viewer's gaze across the composition. In *Children in Street* and its second pull, *Going to School*, as well as in *Children at Play*, the figures are arranged in a zigzag pattern which compels the observer's eye to move from bottom to top. In Prendergast's circus and ballet prints, certain elements recur: clowns in voluminous costumes, girls in tutus, balloons, cymbals, and drums. In *Circus Scene with Horse, Bareback Rider, Dress Rehearsal*, and *Nouveau Cirque (Paris)*, there is a counterpose between strong verticals (posts and flagpoles) and insistently circular forms (drums, tutus, the round spots on the clowns' costumes).

Soon after the beginning of the new century, Prendergast halted his experiments in printmaking to focus his attentions increasingly on oil painting. The first hints of his mature manner—what is termed his "tapestry" style—became apparent at the same time that he ceased making prints. The tapestry style is distinguished by densely painted surfaces, deliberately and painstakingly woven out of patterns of varied brushstrokes; such a surface is the precise antithesis of that of a monotype.

During the course of a dozen years of vigorous creativity, Prendergast produced a monotype oeuvre which is one of the supreme aesthetic treasures of the medium. It represents a brilliant mastery in joining line and color, and in matching discipline and control with immediacy and lightness of touch.

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Whitney Museum of American Art
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120 Park Avenue
New York, New York 10017

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Summer Day, 1901

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